

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

### Guidance for Funeral Services

This document lists recommendations death care service providers, including funeral homes, mortuaries, and embalmers should follow to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and protect the health and safety of staff and clients during funeral services.

**1. Are mortuary, funeral and embalming services considered “Essential Businesses” under the current Health Officer Order?**

Yes, since these services are essential for the care, preservation, and burial or cremation of decedents.

**2. Am I at risk if I go to a funeral service for someone who died of COVID-19?**

There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.

**3. Am I at risk if I touch someone who died of COVID-19 after they have passed away?**

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.

People who are age 65 years and older, pregnant, or have a health problem such as a chronic disease or a weak immune system are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.

There may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. Other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles, and facemask).

**4. What do mortuary, funeral home workers, and embalmers need to know about handling decedents who had COVID-19?**

Follow [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/public-health.html) for infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19.

**5. Is it safe to bury or cremate decedents who were confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19?**

Yes, decedents can be buried, interred or cremated following current state or local requirements.

### 6. Are any funeral services allowed?

Yes, funeral and graveside services are allowed. Guidance for such services is as follows:

- Services may only take place at the funeral home or the location of internment or cremation.
- Due to the risk of spread of COVID-19, limit attendance at funeral services to:
  - Only members of one household of up to ten (10) people (members who live together at the same physical address);
  - One person may view the decedent to confirm the identity as required by the mortuary, funeral home, or embalming service;
  - Essential funeral service staff; and, if desired,
  - One faith leader.
- Adhere to social (physical) distancing of at least 6 feet between the group of household members, the funeral staff and, if present, the faith leader.
- Offer livestreaming as an option for others who want to view the services (see [webcasting resources](#) from the National Funeral Directors Association).
- People who feel sick or are at-risk for serious disease from COVID-19 should stay home.
- Recommend that people should not touch or kiss the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. If touching occurs, the person should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before touching their face and anything or anyone else.

### 7. What other recommendations are there for funeral services?

- Ensure families follow recommendations on social distancing with regard to funeral staff, hand hygiene, and covering coughs and sneezes. Post signs such as "[How to Stop The Spread of Germs](#)," offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Have extra tissues and readily available waste bins on hand.
- Ensure an adequate supply of soap and paper towels in the restrooms and alcohol-based hand sanitizer for families and staff to use.
- Keep the front door open (weather permitting) or ensure a staff person is always available to open a door during services to limit the need for people to touch the door.
- Limit the use of equipment and supplies that may be difficult to disinfect or make it hard to ensure social distancing (e.g. tent sidewalls).

### 8. How are death certificates issued?

At this time, we are only accepting mail-in applications for death certificates. Of note, the Department of Public Health only maintains records of deaths that occurred within one year from the date of death. Please find more information, including the downloadable Application for a Death Certificate, downloadable Certificate of Identity form, mailing addresses based on the date of death, and fees on our **Vital Records Office—Death Section** website:

<http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/DCA/dcadeath.htm>. Any additional questions can be directed to (213) 288-7816 or [VRO@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:VRO@ph.lacounty.gov).

Stay up-to-date on COVID-19 information and recommendations, such as the Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations, by visiting our website: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/>

